To the Society of Enquiry on Missions
Theo. Sem. Princeton N. J.

Pontianak Jan. 14th 1845

Dear Brethren

Your kind communication came to hand at a time of deep affliction & from that day to this the Lord has been pleased with little or no intermission to leave me under the rod. Sickness has been all the while in my family & death has at length come & taken away the desire of my eyes with a stroke. You will doubtless sympathize with me under this sore bereavement but I assure you, my dear brethren dwelling as you do in a land of Gospel light & surrounded as you are with every external circumstance calculated to alleviate the severity of such a blow you can little realize what a breach is thus made in a small & feeble missionary circle in this natural & spiritual wilderness. I am conscious of no desire to exaggerate my troubles. I feel that they are from the Lord & well am I satisfied that He has seen the necessity of each & every one or it would never have been sent. "I know that his judgments are right & that He in faithfulness has afflicted me." But O the desolation produced by this breath of the Almighty!

At home the death of a missionary is generally viewed thro' such a halo of romance as will scarcely disclose a single feature of the reality. It is the death bed of a christian & it is perhaps a calm & peaceful if not a joyful & triumphant one. So far all is well & the scene if truly drawn cannot perhaps be magnified. The victorious saint is translated in a cause & glory. This too is our comfort & it often helps to make us exceeding joyful in all our tribulations. But who in the midst of social comforts & christian privileges ever stoops to contemplate in its bare simplicity the reverse of this transporting picture? The breaking of natures tenderest ties the bursting of hearts alive as there to every human sensibility. The anguish of the soul that finds itself forsaken & forlorn. The sinking of the spirits when its material support is withdrawn. The opening of all the fountains of grief in every ingenuous breast the desolateness of the house from which every apartment bears a living, moving controlling genius has disappeared! Nay is it not a fact that all the most trying circumstances of the case are converted into aliment by a perverted imagination & instead of correcting the hallucinations of fancy foster its illusions by heightening the interest of the scene. Thus in place of a holy sympathy a sort of spiritual jealousy is often produced & we are rather envied as partakers of a species of martyrdom in which all the pain if indeed the existence of such a thing is conceived is lost in the sublimity & grandeur of the transaction. But this is surely not the way to realize our situation nor will it either prepare or prompt the christian community to help us by their prayers. No they must remember that we are men of like passions with themselves, yea imperfect erring sinful men. Sickness & death in the missionary circle whatever alleviations may attend them are still sickness & death. The confusion the sorrow the anguish are the same. Nor is the want of a beloved physician to counsel & assist us with all the consequent perplexity & anxiety an experience in the treatment of disease to be considered only as a fanciful device to augment the impressiveness of the melancholly picture. The tottering flickering blaze of hallowed light which rises in the deepest shedding here & there a solitary ray to cheer the soul in which it rests is none the greater because it has been kindled in the midst of midnight darkness. O my brethren the missionary work is a reality, our trials are a reality, our infirmities are a reality, heathen degradation & misery and heathen ignorance & depravity are a reality, a sober solemn soul-affecting reality.

I have dwelt upon the subject of affliction because it came naturally to hand & at the same time seemed suited to enforce this important truth, not as before intimated from a fondness to make much ado about my own sufferings. Self is a very insignificant creature & there is surely no occasion to make account of what we either do or suffer for its own sake. It is enough to know that if we love God all shall work together for our good. But the cause of God is concerned & I must candidly acknowledge that this disposition to romantic views & feelings appears to me to be one of the most serious obstacles in the way of its successful progress. It is an element of weakness not of strength & notwithstanding the light & glitter it may shed upon them it gives to all our operations a sickly hue which is far from encouraging or animating those who see the necessity of hearty feeling & vigorous exertion.

Indeed the romance of missions is highly mischievous in all its influences. Does it stimulate the christian to benevolence? Yes! but the impulse

to give him is wholly artificial the result of a feverish excitement not only foreign to the good & therefore destitute of any settled principle to constitute a spring of habitual healthy & energetic action but in fact a moral disease whose issue is destruction & whose reaction is languor & imbecility. Here the convulsion leavings & alternate expansions & contractions to which the missionary enterprise is subject from year to year leaving an impression of uncertainty whether any particular undertaking will be sustained & carried through or suffered to struggle for existence if indeed it does not die a natural death; may perhaps making it to depend for its very life upon the shows of zeal or factitious wonders it may achieve by a forced & consequently precocious maturity. Even the missionary candidate does not always if ever escape its influence. It meets us all when we first take up the subject of personal consecration & too often alas turns away the attention from the point really at issue the point of individual duty & either involves us in a fog of insignificant if not imaginary difficulties or lures us by the glare of fanciful or it may be real incentives & inducements. And who has the courage & vigor, the piety & spirituality to rise quite above these minor views & apprehensions & regardless of every other circumstance & motive meet with manly fortitude & honest self-sacrifice the simple question: What does the Master expect of me? Alas while some visionary spirits are captivated by the glare & excited rather than deterred by the fog & a few sober minded & well instructed persons are enabled to soar into the upper regions of thought & get a glimpse of something beyond these uncertain & deceptive mediums of contemplation the mass of those who ought at least to bring themselves to an intelligent decision after having been repeatedly aroused to the subject & as often shrunk from its immediate & thorough examination suffer themselves finally to shuffle away the season for efficient action & with a lame excuse & not unfrequently perhaps a burdened conscience go about some other business. Let it not be supposed however that I would press all into this service. I am well aware that there are many & various spheres of christian enterprise requiring the same zeal devotion & perseverance. I would set up no claim to exclusive preeminence. The object for which I plead is thorough investigation careful study sincere self-scrutiny ingenuous counselling with God & with his most devoted servants all with a view to a clear correct & satisfactory conclusion. Let christians, ministers & missionaries aim at this & pursue it at whatever cost & all will be right. We should have no contest with those who with impartial views honest hearts & warm feelings come to a different result from ourselves. The field is the world & every province has its own intrinsic & relative importance. To whatever then for any person may be led in the proper way are may be sure it is that in which he ought to be. But to secure this we must get from principle not from impulse, we must walk in the pure light of Heaven not in the glare of fancy or fiction nor in the haze of unmanly fear or unchristian cowardice.

These remarks will I trust enable you to appreciate what I have to say in reference to the great radical deficiencies of the Church & people of God & to which we are concerned the causes of the comparative impotence in effecting the first & noblest object of such a visible organization the conversion & salvation of a lost world.

The first of these in order will be found in the article of knowledge. It is very true that in our day all kinds of knowledge are on the advance rapidly on the advance. To me it appears that one of the most striking tokens of the approach of the latter day glory is the fact so prominent & noticeable of the literal accomplishment of the prophecy, "Many shall run to & fro & knowledge shall be increased." Yet it must not be concealed that while there is a constant & manifest increase of knowledge in general there is not a corresponding clearness of view & distinctness of apprehension in individual minds. It may perhaps even be an effect of the flood which is inundating the various channels of intelligence that we rarely any one subject is followed up to its source or considered in all its relations & bearings. In particular I think there is no reason to doubt that in this respect sacred knowledge suffers a greater comparative neglect by the mass even of real christians than when the fountains of information were not broken up & sealed. So much knowledge can be found upon the surface that there is little encouragement to deep research, such a swelling tide of news is constantly pouring in that little time is left & little disposition felt to separate the good from the bad, the useful from the worthless. Too much is apt to dismiss to lay aside the present & the inspiring the exciting for the past the sober the solid attainments of by-gone years. But knowledge to be permanently useful must be tried, pure, comprehensive, substantial.

this is preeminently true of missionary knowledge. What is needed is not so much the indiscriminate detail of events as the evolving of results in their relation to the causes that produced them. In this point of view the History of missions is full of instruction & deserves to be made a study little as much as the general History of the Church. It is calculated to dissipate clouds & mists from the common mind to break up the halo of romance which so much perverts the vision of the fanciful & so often dazzles the perception of the sober & considerate, to purify the views & refine the feelings & chasten at once the hopes & apprehensions of all & thus prepare the Paraclete host of God's elect more earnestly confidently & successfully to combat the powers of darkness & bring a rebellious world into obedience to Christ. We may learn wisdom too as well by the mistakes & disasterings as by the tact & prudence in plan & labor of those who have gone before us. Such knowledge is an invaluable not to say indispensable qualification for the missionary in particular but proportionally also for every one interested in the work & under obligation to promote its success. But how few have hitherto adequately attended to its acquisition? Sad, sad mistake. Dear Sir I am a flood of sober but hallowed light would be thrown upon the whole subject by a thorough & prayerful study. Only a few only a few of our chief missionary establishments say those in Greenland & in India in the County & in the Sandwich Islands.

But Dear Sir I am writing an essay instead of a letter. Excuse my presumption in taking up a subject which however incompetent I may be to treat it & however unsuitable it may be for epistolary correspondence I feel to be of unspeakable importance. Indeed in this respect it seems to me it yields only to that which I have here just assigned in the order of remark this it is & must be considered by all & in every point of view first & foremost I mean genuine & spiritual piety.

This after all is undoubtedly the great desideratum. Is it not also the great defect? O what pigmies are we in the divine life. How weak is our faith, how dormant are our spiritual affections, how contracted & grovelling are our views, how low selfish sordid are our feelings dispositions emotions passions. We are not men, we are but children however full grown we may appear we are but children in piety & how often need the Good Father to bring us on to keep us where we ought to be. O Sir how should we wander if we were not from time to time corrected & chastised & prostrated in the dust emptied of self & made to feel our need of the Spirit. I do fear you there is nothing we missionaries need so much as piety & I must confess there is nothing in which I fear we are so deficient. But we are the messengers of the churches, alas I cannot say the glory of Christ. Do we faithfully represent their spirit or are they too dull reflectors of his image? However this be there is unquestionably a most deplorable defect. If there is one thing more than another which in view of the conversion of the world the Church has reason to cultivate it is deep sterling effective piety which consists in an absolute renunciation of self & an entire devotion to God, which recognizes no principle of action but duty, duty flowing from the love of Christ & no ground of confidence but grace, grace derived immediately from the Holy Ghost. Such piety will bring us into direct communion with the eternal Godhead, the all pure the all powerful the all sufficient & while on our part there will be no preference in the way of instrumentality on his part there will be no lack in the way of cooperation & efficiency. Thus the Church will arise and shine the glorious body of an all glorious Head & nations shall come to her light & kings to the brightness of her rising.

But I cannot dwell upon this subject & besides you have the best of instructors in the way of holiness. Only let me admonish you to make love of this the great rule then be easy. All other things shall be added unto you. Get near to Christ live near to Him & light from Heaven shall shine upon your path. & this it should be up hill all the way you shall neither fail nor be discouraged. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings as eagles they shall run & not be weary & they shall walk & not faint. While bowing at the mercy seat do not forget your poor afflicted brother in Christ

J. B. Thomas

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Ship Bazar

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To/
The Corresponding Secretary
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New Jersey
U. S. A.

Care of U. S. Consul
St. Helena